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From: Enck, Judith

Sent: Fri 4/10/2015 1:47:21 PM

Subject: Sirenusa Response (St John VI Incident) News Clips

Pesticide That Likely Sickened Del. Family On Vacation Reportedly Being Used In Large Amounts In Our Area

April 9, 2015 6:39 PM

By Alexandria Hoff

CBS local PHILADELPHIA

Two teenage boys remain in critical condition after their family was exposed to a pesticide while vacationing in the U.S. Virgin Islands last month.

The U.S. Justice Department is now looking into if Terminix used a pesticide illegally to fumigate the condo below where the Esmond's were staying.

As Eyewitness News reporter Alexandria Hoff found out, that very pesticide is being stored and used right here in our area.

In 2004, OSHA cited Terminix Commercial in Pennsauken after a group of employees were hospitalized due to a chemical exposure.

According to a Terminix spokesperson, it happened while workers were removing a tarp that was put over coco beans that had been treated with with Methyl Bromide.

The company adds that the building that they were tasked with fumigating was 500,000 sq. ft.

Methyl Bromide is the same chemical pesticide that officials say made the Esmond family critically ill. It is illegal for residential use.

Jay Feldman, of the D.C.- based advocacy group Beyond Pesticide, adds that technically Methyl Bromide has been banned altogether since 2005 due to adverse health and environmental effects, but he adds there are ways around that.

"They are called 'Critical Use Exemptions," he said Monday in a Skype interview.

As of March of this year, USDA records list 167 industrial facilities where Methyl Bromide is being used to treat produce. Thirty one of them are in the Delaware Valley.

This might give an idea of why that is – according to data provided to the USDA, 40 percent of all Chilean produce that comes into the United States does so through Philadelphia-area ports. Ninety percent of the Methyl Bromide used is used to treat those imported grapes.

That's because grapes are especially vulnerable to pests and diseases that, if left untreated, could devastate domestic crops and cut off imports.

"We have in this country a huge chemical dependent system of agriculture," adds Feldman.

While the Esmond's story hit the headlines, another one here at home didn't.

Several years ago the Philadelphia-based Martin Law represented a group of dock workers. Attorney Joseph Huttermann told Eyewitness News that they believe their clients were caught downwind of a Methyl Bromide fumigation site near Marcus Hook.

"The results are drastic and have completely disabled some of the people we have represented,' Huttermann said.

One of the men, he says, lost his teeth.

As recovery continues for the Esmond family, who live outside Wilmington, one family member shared that they hope their story makes others aware of a chemical they didn't even knew existed.

According to the USDA, the level of Methyl Bromide used on produce is not harmful for human consumption, even opponents of the chemical share that general thought due to how quickly the vapor dissipates, but there are those who are concerned with how the fumigation process is impacting the Earth's ozone.

A spokesperson with Terminix added that following the 2004 incident the company enrolled employees in an intensive re-training program.

In a statement they said, "We always strive to follow proper procedures and follow safety measures in everything we do."

Methyl Bromide Pesticide in Paradise Poisoning Case Still Used in U.S. Crops

NBC Today

By Bill Briggs

April 7, 2015

http://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/pesticide-vacation-n336576

The pesticide that sickened a Delaware family in the Virgin Islands is banned for indoor

fumigation but U.S. growers will still legally use more than 375 metric tons of the chemical on fields this year through special waivers, federal regulators said.

Methyl bromide is blamed in the accidental poisonings of a mom, dad and their two teen sons at a Caribbean resort. The boys remained critically ill Monday at a Philadelphia hospital. Criminal investigators are examining how and why the bug killer got sprayed in a room beneath the family's rented villa two days before they arrived in mid-March.

U.S. law forbids exterminators from using methyl bromide but the Environmental Protection Agency grants a "critical use exemption" to certain farmers — primarily strawberry growers — letting them inject the chemical directly into their soil, the EPA said.

And some organic advocates are worried about the pesticide perhaps reaching grocery-store fruit.

"You have nurseries producing strawberry transplants — the nurseries are the main users of methyl bromide in the U.S. today. The plants in the fields are all started in nurseries. That ground at the nursery is all fumigated," said Jonathan Winslow, field services manager at Farm Fuel, Inc., a farmer-started, organic distribution and research company on the central California coast.

"The agency (EPA) is still working to determine how much methyl bromide to allow for critical uses in 2016 and 2017"

"So that strawberry transplant can get pulled out of the ground at the nursery and moved to an organic field and be produced under an 'organic' certification," Winslow said. "The use of methyl bromide has diminished, yes. But I am concerned about it. That's why I work for an organic company."

The pesticide is so nasty that, in 1987, the United States and 26 other nations signed a treaty called the Montreal Protocol, vowing to phase out methyl bromide mainly because it depletes the ozone layer. Today, nearly 200 countries have signed that agreement.

But the use of the neurotoxin goes on in farming.

"In the United States, strawberries and tomatoes are the crops which use the most methyl bromide," the EPA says on its website. "Other crops which use this pesticide as a soil fumigant include peppers, grapes, and nut and vine crops."

The EPA offers a "critical use exemption" for methyl bromide to users "who have no technically and economically feasible alternatives and where the lack of methyl bromide will result in a significant market disruption," the EPA said in a statement emailed to NBC News.

Should you worry about pesticides on fruit?

"There is no specified end date for the critical use exemption, but the amount of methyl bromide allowed for critical uses has declined from 7,659 metric tons in 2005 to 376 metric tons in 2015. The agency is still working to determine how much methyl bromide to allow for critical uses in 2016 and 2017," the EPA said.

In California, where most U.S. strawberries are grown, farmers have relied for decades on methyl bromide to control diseases and pests.

According to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, growers in that state used 3.8 million pounds of methyl bromide on 30,000 treated acres in 2012 (the most recent year for which figures are available.) By comparison, California growers used 6.5 million pounds on 53,000 treated acres in 2002.

"Exposure to this chemical will affect not only the target pests it is used against, but non-target organisms as well"

"The use of methyl bromide in California agriculture has dropped significantly over the years as the fumigant is being phased out," said Charlotte Fadipe, spokeswoman for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation.

There appears to be a disconnect, however, between California and federal officials as to when the pesticide may be banned outright.

In California, regulators expect the EPA's critical use exemptions to "go away" in 2017, Fadipe said.

Growers who now get that federal waiver use tractors to drag machines across their plots. Those machines inject the pesticide 12 to 24 inches below the surface of the soil, the EPA said.

That fumigation is done before a crop is planted and it "will effectively sterilize the soil, killing the vast majority of soil organisms," the EPA adds.

Immediately after the pesticide is injected, a field is temporarily covered with a plastic tarp, trapping the chemical in the ground.

"Exposure to this chemical will affect not only the target pests it is used against, but non-target organisms as well," the EPA says on its website. "Because methyl bromide dissipates so rapidly to the atmosphere, it is most dangerous at the actual fumigation site itself."

The people who handle the odorless pesticide are usually considered most at risk.

Human exposure to high concentrations of methyl bromide can cause the central nervous system and the respiratory system to fail, the EPA says. Symptoms of poisoning can include slurred speech, blurred vision, and temporary blindness. More severe symptoms may include bleeding in the brain, heart, and spleen.

In grocery-store fruit, the amounts of potential exposures that concern some organic advocates are far, far smaller and would not lead to such symptoms.

But those advocates still hope to see a full ban enforced in two years.

"Methyl bromide is still being used in a very small scale in agriculture in the ground, and it's done under these critical use exemptions. Originally, that was supposed to have ceased by January 2015," said organic advocate Winslow.

"They're talking about maybe having these critical use exemptions available at an even more diminished amount next year — to finally cease in California in 2017," Winslow added. "We'll see if that actually happens."

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